Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice

An Official Publication of the Informing Science Institute InformingScience.org

JITEiip.org

Volume 24, 2025

Exploring Student Perspectives on Studying Philosophy Through Design Thinking: A Narrative Case Study

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this paper is to explore the integration of Design Thinking (DT) into a philosophy course and its impact on student learning and engagement. The problem addressed is the traditional approach to philosophical education, which often lacks practical relevance and fails to engage students in meaningful ways.
Background	This paper addresses the problem by introducing DT as a pedagogical tool in philosophy education, aiming to bridge the gap between abstract philosophical concepts and practical applications. It explores how DT can transform traditional philosophical inquiry into an experiential learning process that is engaging and relevant to contemporary challenges.
Methodology	The study employs a hybrid methodology combining case study research and narrative inquiry. It focuses on a philosophy course at a Manila higher education institution involving eight students who experienced the DT-integrated curriculum. Data were collected through surveys, in-depth interviews, and analysis of course documents.
Contribution	This paper contributes to the body of knowledge by providing qualitative evidence on the effectiveness of DT in enhancing philosophical education. It highlights the potential of DT to foster empathy, enhance creative and critical thinking, promote collaborative learning, and address practical challenges in educational settings.

Accepting Editor Lalitha Jonnavithula │ Received: January 21, 2025 │ Revised: March 10, March 14, March18, April 4, April 14, 2025 │ Accepted: April 17, 2025.

Cite as: Alma S. Espartinez. (2025). Exploring student perspectives on studying philosophy through design thinking: A narrative case study. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice, 24,* Article 9. https://doi.org/10.28945/5496

Findings	DT fosters empathy-driven engagement with philosophical problems. It enhances students' creative and critical thinking abilities. DT promotes collaborative and interdisciplinary learning. The study identifies implementation pathways and necessary adaptations for educational transformation.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Practitioners are advised to adopt a phased approach to implementing DT in educational settings, develop comprehensive faculty training programs, and establish partnerships with industries to provide students with real-world challenges.
Recommendations for Researchers:	Researchers should explore the broader applicability of DT across different academic disciplines and investigate the long-term impacts of DT on student learning outcomes and skill development.
Impact on Society	The integration of DT in philosophy education can prepare students to address complex societal issues, fostering a generation of innovative problem-solvers. This approach can contribute to societal well-being by promoting empathetic and inclusive solutions to real-world challenges.
Future Research	Future research should focus on the scalability of DT integration across various educational contexts and its impact on diverse student populations. Studies could also explore the integration of DT with digital technologies to enhance remote learning experiences.
Keywords	design thinking, philosophy education, narrative case study, educational innovation, student engagement, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Design Thinking (DT) represents an innovative approach in higher education, fundamentally reimagining how students engage with complex real-life challenges. Unlike traditional methods, DT integrates logic, imagination, intuition, and systemic reasoning to generate innovative solutions that are human-centered and actionable (Aris et al., 2025). Adopting an iterative, empathy-driven process in DT, students can interact with real-world issues more enthusiastically and meaningfully, cultivating a mindset of adaptive problem-solving that responds to human and environmental needs.

This DT approach offers particular promise in disciplines like philosophy, where traditional education often struggles with practical relevance and student engagement. DT creates a natural bridge between abstract philosophical concepts and their real-world applications by emphasizing empathy, creativity, and problem-solving. A Manila-based institution that has pioneered the integration of DT into philosophy education provides an ideal setting for exploring this innovative pedagogical approach.

The impact of DT extends beyond individual classrooms, potentially redesigning entire educational ecosystems by promoting flexibility, interdisciplinary thinking, and responsiveness to contemporary challenges. It transforms students from passive recipients of knowledge to active, empathetic innovators capable of addressing complex societal problems.

This study examines how DT integration in a philosophy course affects student learning and engagement. Focusing on student perspectives is critical for understanding the practical impact of DT in addressing key challenges in philosophy education, such as abstractness, disengagement, and lack of practical relevance. While DT has been widely studied in various educational contexts, its application in humanities – particularly philosophy – remains underexamined. By exploring students' experiences, this study aims to provide practical insights into DT's effectiveness and address existing gaps in the literature regarding its application in philosophical pedagogy. The study has the following objectives:

- To examine how DT enhances students' capacity to apply philosophical thinking to real-world challenges, addressing the gap in the literature on DT's practical application in philosophy education.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities of integrating DT into philosophy education.
- To assess how DT transforms students' learning experiences and prepares them for future-oriented problem-solving, offering insights into diverse educational contexts.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration of DT into philosophy education, this paper is structured as follows. First, the literature review explores the theoretical foundations of DT, its cross-disciplinary applications, and its potential impact on philosophy education. Next, the research methodology is detailed, combining case study and narrative inquiry approaches to capture the institutional context and students' personal experiences. Following this, the findings are presented and discussed, highlighting how DT enhances student engagement, creative and critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Finally, the paper concludes with implications for higher education, practical recommendations for educators and researchers, and suggestions for future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF DESIGN THINKING

DT has evolved from its origins in industrial design into a versatile problem-solving framework emphasizing empathy, iterative prototyping, and human-centered solutions (Brown, 2008). The theoretical foundations of DT can be traced back to Herbert Simon's (1969) *The Sciences of the Artificial,* which introduced the concept of design as a way of thinking and problem-solving. Simon's work laid the groundwork for understanding design as a process of addressing complex, ill-defined problems – a concept further developed by Buchanan (1992) in his seminal paper, *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking.* Buchanan expanded on Simon's ideas by introducing the concept of *'wicked problems,'* which are complex, ambiguous challenges that lack clear solutions. DT's iterative and human-centered approach is particularly well-suited for addressing such problems, making it a valuable framework for exploring ethical and philosophical dilemmas in education.

DT has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach in education that fosters creativity, collaboration, and practical problem-solving skills (Kolko, 2018). Its core principles – empathy, iterative problem-solving, and human-centered design – align closely with the goals of philosophy education, offering a structured framework for bridging the gap between abstract theories and real-world applications (Dorst, 2011; Vial, 2015).

DT offers a promising framework for philosophy education, as its principles address several inherent challenges in traditional philosophy pedagogy. While philosophy education typically emphasizes abstract theories and text-based analysis (Egonsson et al., 2018), DT provides a structured approach that bridges philosophical abstraction and real-world application. The natural alignment between DT's emphasis on empathy and philosophy's examination of diverse perspectives creates productive synergies. By encouraging students to understand different viewpoints deeply, DT fosters a human-centered approach to philosophical inquiry that enhances the exploration of ethical reasoning and moral dilemmas.

Moreover, DT's iterative problem-solving process offers a framework for applying abstract philosophical concepts to real-world challenges. The Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test phases guide students through connecting philosophical ideas to contemporary issues (Vial, 2015). This approach enhances critical and creative thinking skills while empowering students to see philosophy as a tool for addressing complex societal problems, such as ethical decision-making in business or policy design (Geissdoerfer et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2016). In grounding philosophical inquiry in tangible challenges, DT makes the discipline more accessible and engaging for students while preserving its intellectual rigor.

Cross-Disciplinary Applications and Impact

The potential for applying DT to philosophy education is supported by its successful implementation across numerous disciplines and sectors. In the corporate sphere, companies like Apple and IDEO have demonstrated DT's capacity to drive market leadership through anticipatory product development and enhanced customer satisfaction (Geissdoerfer et al., 2016; Giacomin, 2014; Matthews & Wrigley, 2017). Institutions like the Mayo Clinic have leveraged DT to revolutionize patient care systems through empathy-driven process redesign (Altman et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2016). Similarly, DT has been used in the technology sector to bridge the gap between advanced functionality and intuitive user experience, creating solutions that resonate with diverse users (Liedtka, 2015).

This widespread adoption reflects DT's evolution from a specialized design methodology to a comprehensive framework for innovation and problem-solving. As Fry (1999) argues in *Defuturing: A New Design Philosophy,* contemporary designers must transcend traditional boundaries to become agents of change who actively engage with sustainability and systemic complexity. While DT has demonstrated success in fields like healthcare and technology, its application in education, particularly philosophy, represents an important frontier for further exploration and development.

Critical Discourse and Evolving Perspectives on Design Thinking

Despite its promising applications, DT's broad acceptance and use have sparked scholarly debate about its effectiveness and theoretical foundations. A central issue is the "democratization paradox" (Kimbell, 2011), which is the tension between making DT accessible and preserving its depth. The standardization of DT into toolkits risks oversimplifying complex design processes, potentially undermining the nuanced expertise developed through professional practice. Similarly, Norman and Verganti (2014) argue that the emphasis on disruptive innovation in DT may lead organizations to prioritize novelty over practicality, a critique echoed by Vinsel and Russell (2020), who document cases where DT-driven innovation resulted in over-complicated solutions to straightforward problems.

Empirical validation of DT's impact also presents significant methodological challenges. Norman and Verganti (2014) highlight the difficulty of establishing clear causal relationships between DT implementation and organizational outcomes, particularly when quantifying inherently qualitative elements like empathetic understanding or creative innovation. Manzini's (2016) concept of the "innovation fetish" further critiques DT's emphasis on disruptive innovation, suggesting that it may lead organizations to prioritize novelty over practicality. These critiques underscore the need for a balanced approach to DT, ensuring accessibility without sacrificing methodological rigor, particularly in specialized educational contexts where learning outcomes must remain the primary focus.

Design Thinking in Educational Contexts

Addressing these critical perspectives, researchers have examined how DT integration into education represents a significant pedagogical shift, moving from traditional, passive learning models to dynamic, participatory environments where students actively shape their learning experiences (Balakrishnan, 2022). This approach redefines how knowledge is created, shared, and applied, fostering greater student engagement and agency while addressing some of the methodological concerns noted by critics.

Empirical research highlights DT's transformative impact across educational levels. Studies by He et al. (2023) and Yeung and Ng (2024) show that DT enhances student self-efficacy, engagement, and learning outcomes while promoting critical skills such as empathetic reasoning, collaborative problem-solving, and non-linear thinking (Albay & Eisma, 2021; Angheloiu et al., 2020; Baker & Moukhliss, 2020). These skills are increasingly essential in modern professional contexts, extending DT's benefits beyond academic achievement.

Integrating digital technologies with DT principles has further enriched learning environments, preparing students for technology-driven workplaces (Panke, 2019; Yu et al., 2024). However, challenges such as institutional resistance, resource constraints, and the need for faculty development remain. Successful implementations often begin with pilot programs, supported by comprehensive faculty training and collaborative networks for sharing best practices.

DESIGN THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Building on these critical perspectives, integrating DT into higher education has become an innovative force in modern pedagogy. As institutions increasingly adopt DT into their curricula, faculty have observed its significant impact on students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Research consistently shows that DT enhances learning across disciplines and age groups despite challenges in merging it with traditional methods (Affouneh et al., 2020; Albay & Eisma, 2021; Callahan, 2019; Revano & Garcia, 2020).

DT fosters creativity and soft skills (e.g., empathy and teamwork) in digital learning environments (Dorst, 2019; Sung & Kelley, 2019). Its versatility is evident in its application across diverse fields, including management (Dunne & Martin, 2006), hospitality education (Assen et al., 2023), health sciences (Saidi et al., 2020), and engineering (Aris et al., 2025) to architecture (Kroes et al., 2008). For example, in healthcare education, DT has been used to improve patient care for deaf individuals through experiential learning (Saidi et al., 2020). This broad applicability highlights DT's role in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and preparing students for diverse career paths.

DESIGN THINKING IN PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION

Building upon the established applications of DT in higher education, a particularly promising frontier emerges at the intersection of DT and philosophy education. While DT has demonstrated success across numerous disciplines (Baričević & Luić, 2023; Wati & Yuniawatika, 2020), its methodology continues evolving to equip educators and students for complex 21st-century challenges (Balakrishnan, 2022; Gleason & Jaramillo Cherrez, 2021). The documented success in other fields suggests DT will increasingly shape higher education's future, particularly by fostering creativity through digital learning environments (Yeung & Ng, 2024).

However, DT's integration into philosophy education remains largely unexplored, offering the unique potential to reshape traditional philosophical pedagogy. This approach effectively bridges the gap between abstract concepts and practical applications, particularly in ethics and decision-making (Blay & Espartinez, 2024), addressing several key challenges that have long plagued philosophy instruction:

- *Abstract Concepts*. DT grounds philosophical abstractions in tangible problems through empathy and human-centered approaches, making theories accessible when exploring ethical dilemmas.
- *Practical Relevance*: Philosophy often struggles to demonstrate real-world value. DT's iterative process enables students to apply philosophical frameworks to concrete challenges like ethical corporate decision-making.
- *Text-Heavy Approach*: Traditional philosophy relies on reading and analysis. DT introduces structured brainstorming and prototyping, shifting from passive to active learning.
- *Engaging Diverse Learners*: DT's collaborative nature creates inclusive environments where diverse perspectives enrich philosophical discourse.
- *Ethical Problem-Solving*: DT moves students beyond theoretical discussions to develop actionable solutions for complex ethical issues.

Through teamwork and empathy, DT enriches philosophical discourse while providing tools to apply theories to practical difficulties. Rather than pursuing single lines of reasoning, DT encourages exploring multiple philosophical perspectives, aligning with comparative philosophy methods while adding structured techniques (Patel et al., 2024). This approach proves particularly valuable for examining complex ethical dilemmas and questions of human experience.

CURRENT STATE OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

While promising based on the theoretical alignments described above, the intersection of DT and philosophy education represents an understudied yet potentially transformative pedagogical innovation. Despite DT's significant impact across various educational disciplines, as documented earlier, its specific application in philosophical studies remains notably underexplored. This gap creates uncertainty about such innovations' effectiveness and leaves questions about DT's value in developing core philosophical competencies. Traditional philosophy education, which relies heavily on text-based analysis and conventional critical thinking methods, often struggles to engage students or demonstrate practical relevance – precisely the challenges that design-oriented approaches have successfully addressed in other fields.

Current research in philosophical pedagogy acknowledges that traditional methods, while rigorous, frequently fail to maintain student interest or connect theory to real-world applications. This echoes the broader educational challenges identified in previous sections. Modern educational environments demand more interactive and application-oriented approaches. As demonstrated through the empirical studies cited earlier, DT has proven transformative in other disciplines, suggesting its potential in philosophy education. This study responds to Egonsson et al.'s (2018) call in *Exploring Practical Philosophy: From Action to Values* to make philosophy – "an activity characterized by a high level of abstraction and generality" – more practical and relevant. Egonsson et al. (2018) urge educators to ensure philosophical inquiry addresses real-world problems rather than remaining confined to academic circles.

While Vial (2015) integrated philosophical inquiry into design education at the postgraduate level to help designers question and analyze the human dimensions of their projects beyond practical and aesthetic considerations, this study takes the opposite approach. Instead of bringing philosophy into design education, this study applies DT to philosophy education to enhance its practicality, experiential learning, and direct application to real-world challenges. This approach addresses the limitations of traditional philosophy pedagogy highlighted throughout this review.

Despite DT's widespread use in fields like business and engineering, as outlined in the cross-disciplinary applications section, its integration into philosophy education remains understudied. While DT has been widely applied in fields like business, healthcare, and STEM education, its application in philosophy education remains limited. A comprehensive search of academic databases from 2010 to 2025 revealed only two relevant studies – Egonsson et al. (2018) and Vial (2015) – focusing on integrating philosophical thinking into design contexts rather than applying DT methodologies to philosophy education. This highlights a significant gap in the literature and underscores the need for research that explores how DT can enhance philosophy education.

This narrative case study addresses these gaps through several innovative contributions. As the first narrative case study on DT integration into philosophy education at the higher education level, it offers detailed insights into student experiences with this innovative pedagogical approach. The research responds directly to calls for more practical, engaging strategies for philosophy education while maintaining academic rigor. It also contributes empirical evidence to evaluate DT's broader applicability in humanities education, offering actionable insights for adapting philosophy courses to contemporary educational needs without compromising their essential characteristics. Finally, it advances the discourse on interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches in higher education, building upon the theoretical foundations and practical applications discussed throughout this literature review.

Despite its widespread adoption in fields like business, healthcare, and technology, the application of DT in philosophy education remains underexplored. While traditional philosophy pedagogy emphasizes abstract theories and text-based analysis, DT offers a human-centered, iterative approach that bridges the gap between theory and practice. By integrating empathy, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving, DT has the potential to transform philosophy education, making it more relevant and engaging for students. This study addresses the existing research gap by exploring how DT can be effectively integrated into philosophy courses, offering actionable insights for educators and researchers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary focus of this research is to explore college students' perspectives regarding integrating DT into their philosophy courses. This inquiry aims to understand how students perceive the impact of DT in their educational experience in their philosophy course. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain how DT enhances their philosophy education. It also aims to know the challenges they encounter when integrating DT into the study of philosophy. The research questions are the following:

1. How do students experience the integration of Design Thinking as an innovative pedagogical approach in their philosophy course?
2. In what ways does Design Thinking enhance students' capacity to apply philosophical thinking to real-world challenges?
3. How does this educational innovation transform students' learning experiences and prepare them for future-oriented problem-solving?
4. What implementation challenges and opportunities emerge when integrating Design Thinking as an innovative approach in philosophy education?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a hybrid methodology that integrates case study research with narrative inquiry, aiming to explore the implementation of DT in a philosophy course at a higher education institution in Manila. This methodology addresses the study's specific objectives and research questions. On the one hand, the case study focuses on the philosophy curriculum's institutional context, course structure, and DT implementation. This approach is particularly suited to identifying the challenges and opportunities of integrating DT into philosophy education (Objective 2 and Research Question 4). By examining the broader pedagogical framework, the case study provides insights into how DT is operationalized and the institutional factors that influence its effectiveness.

On the other hand, the narrative inquiry component captures the personal stories and experiences of students who participated in the DT-integrated philosophy course. This method is tailored to explore how students experience the integration of DT (Research Question 1), how it enhances their capacity to apply philosophical thinking to real-world challenges (Research Question 2), and how it transforms their learning experiences and prepares them for future-oriented problem-solving (Research Question 3 and Objective 3). By focusing on individual narratives, the study gains a detailed and layered understanding of the subjective impact of DT on students' learning and engagement.

This hybrid approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the structural and experiential dimensions of DT integration, ensuring that the study addresses its objectives and research questions holistically.

CASE STUDY FRAMEWORK

A case study is a research approach that delves deeply into specific instances or phenomena within their natural settings. This methodology enables researchers to examine complex situations through a detailed, contextual lens, uncovering nuances and relationships that might otherwise remain hidden in broader research approaches (Feagin et al., 2016; Yin, 2009). By focusing intensively on a bounded system – whether it's an individual, organization, program, or event – case studies illuminate the intricate interplay between various factors and circumstances that shape real-world situations. The case study component of this study serves as the foundation of this research, focusing on the institutional context, course structure, and the specifics of DT implementation. This method is particularly suited for examining complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, providing a detailed understanding of the institutional and pedagogical frameworks involved. The case study approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of how DT is integrated into the philosophy curriculum, assessing its effectiveness and identifying challenges and opportunities.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Complementing the case study approach, narrative inquiry was employed to collect and interpret personal stories that reveal how individuals experience and understand the world (Clandinin, 2006). This method captured detailed student experiences and reflections from the DT-integrated philosophy course, providing rich qualitative data highlighting participants' subjective perceptions.

By emphasizing lived experiences, narrative inquiry offered insights into how students perceived and interacted with the DT-based pedagogical approaches, adding contextual depth to the broader case study findings. This method revealed how theoretical applications of DT translated into practical, everyday student experiences, enhancing the study's relevance to real-world educational settings.

Data collection occurred in August 2022 through online surveys, semi-structured interviews with eight participants, and analysis of course documents. The data underwent thematic analysis using deductive coding (based on predefined themes from literature) and inductive coding (themes emerging from the data), following Braun and Clarke's (2006) established methodology.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study were carefully selected from a group of college students enrolled in a philosophy course during the second and third terms of the 2022-2023 academic year, all of whom had firsthand experience with DT in a digital learning environment. The narrative inquiry was designed to explore their personal stories and detailed experiences with DT. It aimed to provide insights into how this pedagogical tool influenced their learning and thinking processes in philosophy.

An initial survey was distributed among 875 students across 25 philosophy class sections during the specified terms to begin the selection process. From this group, 151 students responded, providing detailed viewpoints on using DT in their classes. Eight participants were chosen from the respondents for in-depth interviews to probe the students' reflective and subjective experiences with DT, exploring its impact on their learning experiences within the philosophy course.

The decision to focus on eight participants was intentional and aligned with the goals of narrative inquiry, which prioritizes depth over breadth. By selecting a smaller, purposive sample, the study aimed to capture rich, detailed, and contextually grounded insights into how students experienced the integration of DT into their philosophy education. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of individual narratives, which would have been difficult to achieve with a larger sample. While the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings, it provided the opportunity to delve deeply into the participants' transformations and reflective experiences, offering valuable qualitative insights that inform future research and practice.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives and experiences (Table 1). The criteria for choosing these eight participants included demographic factors such as gender, academic performance, and diversity in thought and background to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives. Also, in selecting students, the study aimed to include students who demonstrated a particularly reflective or insightful response in the initial survey, suggesting a deeper engagement with DT. This strategic choice of participants was intended to ensure a balanced representation of the course demographic and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways DT can influence philosophical inquiry and critical thinking in an academic setting. Each participant served as a crucial narrator in the research, providing unique insights into the integration of DT in philosophical education.

Table 1. Demographics of the 151 students

School	SDA		SMIT		SHRIM		SDG		Full sample	
Data	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Gender										
Male	48	32	15	9	8	5	3	2	74	49
Female	58	38	6	4	11	7	2	1	77	51
Year level										
1st	57	38	19	13	17	11	3	2	96	64
2nd	29	19	2	1	1	6	1	6	33	22
3rd	12	8	0	0	1	6	1	6	14	9
4th	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5
Creativity level										
Designer	81	54	9	6	3	4	1	0	95	62
Non-designer	25	17	13	8	16	11	2	3	56	38

Note. This table represents the demographics of the participants representing all four schools of the college, with 106 participants from the School of Design and Arts (SDA), 21 from the School of Management and Information Technology (SMIT), 19 from the School of Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management (SHRIM), and five from the School of Diplomacy and Governance (SDG).

The survey participants represent a balanced gender distribution of 49% males and 51% females. Regarding their academic standing, the majority are first-year students, accounting for 64% of respondents. This is followed by second-year students at 22%, third-year students at 9%, and fourth-year students at 5%. This distribution is expected as the philosophy course is primarily offered to first-year students in their initial year of college.

Table 2 presents the demographic data of eight participants, evenly split by gender (four males and four females), with ages ranging from 19 to 21 (mostly 20 years old). Two participants were from the School of Design and Arts (SDA) – one designer and one non-designer. Two were non-designers from the School of Management and Information Technology (SMIT). Two of them studied at the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management (SHRIM), both of whom are designers. The remaining two were designers from the School of Digital Governance (SDG). This resulted in a balanced mix, with half identified as designers and half as non-designers.

Participants were categorized as 'designers' if enrolled in design-related courses (e.g., SDA) and 'non-designers' if enrolled in non-design-related courses (e.g., SMIT, SHRIM, or SDG). This categorization allowed the study to explore how students from different academic backgrounds engage with DT in a philosophy course, ensuring diverse perspectives and experiences. This approach allowed the study to explore how students from different academic backgrounds engage with DT in a philosophy course, ensuring diverse perspectives and experiences. By comparing the responses of designers and non-designers, the study aimed to identify whether prior exposure to DT influenced students' ability to apply DT principles in a philosophical context.

Table 2. Demographics of the eight students

Name	Gender	Age	Year level	Course	Creativity level
S1	Female	20	1st	SDA	Designer
S2	Male	21	2nd	SMIT	Non-designer
S3	Female	20	1st	SHRIM	Designer
S4	Male	19	1st	SDG	Designer
S5	Female	20	1st	SDA	Non-designer
S6	Male	21	2nd	SMIT	Non-designer
S7	Female	20	1st	SHRIM	Designer
S8	Male	19	1st	SDG	Designer

Note: This table provides a snapshot of the diverse backgrounds and characteristics of the participants, which can influence their experiences and perspectives in the study related to the use of DT in their philosophy course.

However, it is important to note that this categorization has limitations. For example, some non-designers may have had prior exposure to DT through extracurricular activities or personal interests, and the study did not account for variations in the depth of DT exposure among designers. Future studies could consider alternative categorizations, such as measuring students' prior exposure to DT through a pre-course survey, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how prior knowledge influences students' engagement with DT in a philosophy course.

DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

The data collection process utilized a multi-method approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the integration of DT in a philosophy course. Online surveys were conducted initially to collect quantitative and qualitative data on student perceptions and experiences with DT in their philosophy course. These surveys were administered during the first two weeks of August 2022 and aimed to gather initial insights that would inform the more detailed phases of the study.

Building upon these preliminary survey findings, the study moved to its main data collection phase, which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight carefully selected students. Developing the interview protocol was a critical step, informed by insights from initial surveys, preliminary group discussions with students, and a thorough literature review on DT's educational implications. These inputs helped tailor the interview questions to address specific aspects of DT implementation, ensuring the interviews yield deep, actionable insights.

To ensure methodological rigor, the interview protocol was pilot-tested with a small group of students not part of the main study to verify the questions' relevance, clarity, and appropriate pacing. Valuable feedback from these initial interviews was then used to refine the protocol, improving its effectiveness for the main study. It should be noted that data from the pilot interviews were not included in the final analysis to maintain the integrity of the research.

With the refined protocol in hand, eight selected participants were interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in a semi-structured format that balanced consistency with flexibility. Participants were invited to share their narratives, reflections, and insights about their experiences with DT in the philosophy course. These in-depth conversations created space for participants to make sense of their experiences, leading to meaningful moments of reflection and realization.

The research process continued systematically after each interview, as the content was transcribed and thoroughly reviewed to identify emergent themes and areas requiring further exploration. Insights gained from early interviews informed subsequent ones, ensuring a dynamic and responsive approach to data collection. The final interview protocol addressed key aspects of the student's engagement with DT, including challenges faced during the course, creative solutions developed through DT, and collaborative dynamics encountered in group activities. This structured yet adaptable approach ensured that each interview remained focused and constructive while allowing space to explore unexpected insights.

To complement the rich narrative data from participants, a thorough analysis of course documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, and student projects, was conducted. These materials provided essential contextual information for understanding the formal structure and pedagogical intentions behind integrating DT, thus triangulating the data and strengthening the validity of the findings from participant interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved moving between the broader case study perspective and the individual narratives. A thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and themes across all data sources. Concurrently, close attention was paid to each participant's unique stories and experiences, considering how these individual accounts fit into the larger picture of DT integration.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and their privacy was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Participants were also invited to review and comment on their narrative accounts to ensure accurate representation of their voices.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Data sources were triangulated, and surveys, interviews, and document insights were compared. Member checking was conducted, with participants reviewing the interpretations of their narratives. Furthermore, peer debriefing sessions with colleagues not involved in the study were held to challenge assumptions and interpretations.

Results

As a hub of innovation, this institution in Manila has introduced a pioneering method of teaching philosophy at the college level to enhance academic relevance and stimulate intellectual engagement among students. Philosophy, an undergraduate course at this higher education institution in the Philippines, is recognized for its intellectual rigor, requiring extensive critical analysis and dense reading. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift in instructional methods. In 2020, DT was adopted as a pedagogical tool, with faculty members receiving ongoing training in its application within the course framework. DT was integrated as a core instructional strategy to enhance academic relevance and stimulate intellectual engagement. Despite the introduction of DT, students are still expected to engage in the rigorous intellectual exercise of crafting well-supported arguments drawing from diverse philosophical perspectives. The course was delivered entirely online.

Case Study: Why Design Thinking in Philosophy

Exploring the integration of DT within philosophy education has introduced a new perspective in their collective approach to teaching. What if the instruction could help students move beyond the traditional barriers set by heavy critical analysis? Imagine if teaching methods could open new ways of thinking when participants feel stuck. Consider creating educational experiences that engage students and encourage them to think creatively, helping them find new solutions where they previously saw none. This approach could change how participants interact with philosophical concepts, promoting a more active and engaging way to think critically.

By incorporating DT into philosophy education, the Philosophy Department of this higher institution aimed to create a learning environment that supports and develops their students' creative and critical thinking skills, preparing them to address complex issues effectively. The integration of DT into the philosophy course followed a structured approach, mirroring the phases of DT itself.

Empathize

Empathizing means understanding the users' needs and problems through observation and engagement. In the *Empathize* phase, the philosophy professors of this institution dedicated themselves to gaining a deep understanding of the student's experiences, needs, and challenges within the philosophy course. Detailed interviews and comprehensive surveys were conducted to gather direct input from students about their experiences, struggles, and expectations concerning the course. Using the data gathered, empathy maps were created to visualize and analyze students' needs, thoughts, feelings, and pain points regarding the course.

Define

Building on insights from the *Empathize* phase, the *Define* stage articulates the core problems that need to be addressed. This phase focused on pinpointing the specific educational challenges – the "wicked problems" – that needed addressing within the philosophy course. The insights from the empathy maps and other data sources were synthesized to define the core challenges in a clear and actionable manner. This synthesis involved identifying common patterns and themes across different student experiences. Clear and concise problem statements were formulated to articulate the challenges identified. These statements served as a guide for developing solutions and were crafted to encapsulate the essence of the student's struggles and needs. The defined problems and goals were shared with all stakeholders for validation and alignment. This step ensured that the course redesign efforts were supported and understood across the board, setting a solid foundation for the ideation and development phases that followed. By meticulously carrying out the *Empathize* and *Define* phases, the faculty ensured that the redesign of the philosophy course was deeply rooted in the actual needs and challenges of the students, paving the way for creative and effective solutions in the subsequent phases of the DT process.

Ideate

The *Ideation* phase involved creative and critical thinking to solve the identified challenges. Faculty brainstormed and designed a 14-week module structure culminating in a final DT project showcasing students' creativity, design skills, and empathy. A comprehensive Learning Pack was also proposed, including all necessary resources to facilitate the delivery of the philosophy course, such as modules, PowerPoint slides, video lectures, and a progress-tracking system enhanced by digital badges to motivate and visually track student progress through the course. Following the insights gained during the *Empathize* phase, the *Ideate* phase involved generating creative solutions to address the identified challenges. This phase was characterized by collaborative brainstorming and critical thinking. Faculty members participated in multiple brainstorming sessions, using techniques like mind mapping, sketching, and 3D printing to generate various ideas. Workshops were organized where faculty collaborated to refine ideas and explore how they could be practically implemented in the course structure. Preliminary ideas were presented to a small group of students and peer faculty for initial feedback, ensuring that the ideas were aligned with student needs and educational goals.

Prototype

In the *Prototype* phase, the proposed solutions from the *Ideate* phase were translated into a tangible course design. Prototyping is creating preliminary versions of products or solutions. This involved the creation of a detailed Learning Pack, methodically developed by two leading faculty members who received a grant from the institution to develop the learning pack. The Learning Pack included a variety of educational tools designed to enhance the learning experience. Each of the 14-week modules was outlined with specific learning objectives, readings, and interactive activities that align with the DT principles. Comprehensive digital resources, such as PowerPoint slides, video lectures, and case studies, were prepared to support the content delivery and facilitate a deeper understanding of philosophical concepts through the lens of DT. An innovative progress-tracking system was integrated, utilizing digital badges to visually represent student achievements and milestones throughout the course. This Learning Pack was then subjected to a rigorous community review process involving other faculty members, educational designers, and selected student representatives. Their feedback was crucial in assessing the practicality and effectiveness of the course design, ensuring it met the diverse needs of all students.

Iterate

To iterate means to refine and improve the prototypes based on feedback. During the *Iterate* phase, the course design underwent multiple iterations based on the comprehensive feedback gathered during the community review. This iterative process was essential for refining the educational materials and approach, ensuring that each course element was optimized for student engagement and learning outcomes. Adjustments were made to the course structure, content, and digital resources based on specific suggestions from the review process. This included enhancing the interactivity of online modules, improving the clarity of instructional videos, and adding more real-life examples to illustrate philosophical theories. The course was pilot-tested for one year in 12 philosophy classes to gauge student reactions and learning outcomes. This step was crucial for making real-time adjustments before the full launch. After thorough testing and refinement, final adjustments were made to the course structure. Special attention was given to ensuring the course was accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, by adhering to accessibility standards and incorporating inclusive design principles.

As the course design was finalized, the materials were uploaded to the institution's Learning Management System (LMS) named BigSky, which supports a sandbox environment that allows for further development and testing of the course without student visibility. This environment ensured that all aspects of the course were fully functional and ready for student engagement. The course was then rolled out, ready to offer a novel, engaging, and effective learning experience in philosophy shaped by the principles of DT.

OUTCOMES AND INNOVATIONS

The redesigned philosophy course began in 2022-2023, with eleven faculty members utilizing the new materials. Faculty retained the flexibility to adapt the content as needed, ensuring continuous improvement and relevance. BigSky's interactive features facilitate a "design transaction" (Schon, 1992), promoting a collaborative learning environment where students and teachers benefit mutually from shared insights. The course has also included a series of webinars where students present their final design projects to address societal issues. Some of these projects have gained international recognition, won awards, and highlighted the global applicability and impact of the students' work.

The successful implementation of DT in the philosophy course has revitalized the teaching of philosophy and equipped students with essential skills in creativity, problem-solving, and empathy. This approach serves as a model for other departments and institutions aiming to integrate innovative teaching methods that prepare students for complex real-world challenges. The Philosophy Learning Pack developed through this process supported faculty across the institution in adopting DT in their teaching practices, further extending the impact of this initiative.

Feedback-driven refinements, based on surveys and interviews with students, faculty, and designers, have significantly enhanced the course's effectiveness and relevance. These iterative adjustments, aligning with evolving educational needs and institutional goals, underscore the dynamic nature of DT in responding to the educational community's needs.

The case study outlined above showed the creative integration of DT into the philosophy curriculum at this Manila-based institution. This innovative approach, initiated in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has redefined the educational landscape, making philosophy more interactive and less monotonous, more pertinent and less insipid, more captivating and less dreary, infusing new vigor into a subject that can sometimes be traditionally perceived as "uninspiring." The structured phases of DT – Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Iterate – have systematically addressed the unique educational challenges within the philosophy course, leading to a redesigned curriculum that made philosophy more engaging and less intimidating.

As the course design was finalized and implemented, the Philosophy Department witnessed a significant shift in the teaching and learning dynamics. BigSky facilitated a seamless transition to a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. This platform supported the new educational strategies embedded in the DT framework, allowing for continuous refinement and adaptation based on real-time feedback. The outcomes of this initiative have been promising, with faculty members and students experiencing a more collaborative and engaging educational process. Notably, the revised course design facilitated the development of iterated prototypes into tangible projects, such as videos, which garnered international acclaim by winning competitions. This success highlighted the global relevance and impact of the student projects and significantly enhanced the institution's reputation on the world stage.

While the case study provides a comprehensive overview of the structural and pedagogical changes within the philosophy course, it is equally important to examine the personal experiences and perceptions of the students directly involved. This is where narrative inquiry comes into play, offering a lens through which individual stories and subjective experiences can be explored. Narrative inquiry allows for a nuanced understanding of how the integration of DT has impacted the learning experiences within the philosophy course.

Narrative Inquiry: Students' Individual Stories and Experiences

As DT is a relatively new pedagogical tool in this context, its introduction presents both opportunities and challenges. The narrative inquiry focused on capturing students' voices from this institution, shedding light on their personal experiences through the transformed educational model. This approach is particularly crucial for understanding the adaptation process and the meaning that students ascribed to their experiences with DT in Philosophy. By examining these personal narratives, the study aims to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and reception of DT as a learning strategy, enriching the broader case study with lived experiences and individual reflections.

Building on the detailed case study of the integration of DT in the philosophy course, four global themes were identified, capturing the core insights and outcomes of this pedagogical innovation (Table 3). These three themes are (1) fostering genuine engagement, (2) enhancing creative and critical thinking, and (3) promoting collaborative learning. Each theme is further divided into organizing and basic themes, which are supported by specific coded segments from the data collected. These themes collectively highlight the impact of DT on students' learning experiences and the challenges encountered during its implementation. Below, these global themes are presented, providing a structured overview of how DT has reshaped educational practices and student engagement in the philosophy course.

Table 3. Thematic analysis from global themes to coded segments

Global themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes	Coded segment
Fostering genuine engagement	Empathy-driven engagement	Human-centered approach	"Design Thinking represents critical thinking by addressing societal challenges and enhancing user engagement and appeal. It stands unparalleled in preparing students for future learning landscapes." (S1)
		Perspective-taking	"Being able to empathize and actually recognize those around you is a great feeling and is quite enjoyable considering that it means you're connecting to something, may you be a part of it in the first place or not. It's rewarding because it gives awareness, and at the same

Global themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes	Coded segment
			time makes you understand, in a deeper sense, some things that are mostly overlooked." (S3)
	Practical application	Real-world relevance	"Philosophy exemplifies a subject that transcends traditional learning by integrating real-life challenges and solutions, making learning deeply relevant and impactful." (S5)
			"The DT process helped me see philosophy not just as abstract ideas but as tools to solve real problems. It made me feel more connected to the material and to my classmates." (S4)
Enhancing creative and critical thinking	Learner-centered approach	Active engagement	"Design Thinking immerses students in topics, fostering a challenging yet productive interaction that enhances both engagement and understanding." (S2)
	Multi-dimensional thinking	Innovative problem-solving	"Design Thinking provides valuable insights into effective learning by addressing broad societal, national, and global challenges." (S6)
			"This approach elevates students' critical and creative thinking to a multi-dimensional experience." (S4)
Promoting collaborative learning	Interdisciplinary connections	Collective creativity	"Collaborative projects align students on similar intellectual paths, enhancing collective creativity and problem-solving." (S7)
			"Working with my professor and classmates helped me see how to turn abstract theoretical discussions into structured design challenges without losing philosophical depth." (S8)
			"Working in teams during the DT projects allowed us to combine different perspectives and come up with creative solutions that none of us could have developed alone." (S7)
	Inclusive design for learning	Inclusive approach	"Students doing philosophy often recognize it as the optimal model for comprehensive, integrated learning." (S1)
		Digital readiness	"Design Thinking is poised to revolutionize digital learning, offering a format that transcends physical boundaries and fosters independent, innovative thinking." (S2)
			"Design Thinking is effective in creating engaging, student-centered educational experiences online." (S5)
Addressing implementation challenges	Adaptation to online learning	Student-centered approach	"Adapting to online learning environments can be challenging due to issues like isolation, lack of motivation, time management difficulties, and technical problems. These challenges require innovative solutions to ensure effective learning." (S5) "The online platform was great for collaboration, but there were times when technical issues made it hard to access materials or work on group projects." (S7)

Global themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes	Coded segment
	Paradigm shift	Resistance to change	“At first, I wasn’t sure how Design Thinking fits into a philosophy course. It felt very different from what I was used to. But as we went through the process, I started to see how it could help us think more creatively about philosophical problems.” (S2) “It was hard, at first, to see how philosophical theories could be applied to real-world problems. The DT process helped me make those connections, but it took time to adjust to this new way of thinking.” (S4)
		Time constraints and workload	“The DT projects were really engaging, but they also required a lot of time and effort. It was sometimes hard to keep up with the workload, especially when we had other assignments and exams.” (S6)

Note. This table provides the thematic analysis from global themes to coded segments derived from the data collected from the survey and in-depth interviews conducted with the students from August 15 to August 30, 2022.

Implementation Challenges

While integrating DT into the philosophy course yielded significant benefits, it was not without its challenges. These challenges highlight the complexities of adopting an innovative pedagogical approach in a traditionally heavily text-based and abstract discipline like philosophy. Table 4 indicates the key challenges encountered during the implementation process, supported by student reflections and specific examples.

Table 4. Key challenges encountered by the students

Challenge	Student quotes
Adapting to online learning	“Adapting to online learning environments can be challenging due to issues like isolation, lack of motivation, time management difficulties, and technical problems.” (S5) “The online platform was great for collaboration, but there were times when technical issues made it hard to access materials or work on group projects.” (S7)
Balancing abstract theory with practical application	“It was hard, at first, to see how philosophical theories could be applied to real-world problems. The DT process helped me make those connections, but it took time to adjust to this new way of thinking.” (S4)
Time constraints and workload	“The DT projects were really engaging, but they also required a lot of time and effort. It was sometimes hard to keep up with the workload, especially when we had other assignments and exams.” (S6)
Resistance to change	“At first, I wasn’t sure how Design Thinking fits into a philosophy course. It felt very different from what I was used to. But as we went through the process, I started to see how it could help us think more creatively about philosophical problems.” (S2)

Note: The key challenges are derived from the students’ narratives.

DISCUSSION

Integrating DT into the philosophy curriculum at a Manila-based institution has profoundly reshaped the educational experience, offering an innovative pedagogical approach that bridges abstract philosophical concepts with real-world applications. Through the narratives of eight students, this study clarifies how DT fosters genuine engagement, enhances creative and critical thinking, promotes collaborative learning, and addresses implementation challenges. These findings not only align with the research objectives but also provide actionable insights for educators and institutions seeking to innovate their teaching practices.

FOSTERING GENUINE ENGAGEMENT

Integrating DT into the philosophy course has made learning more engaging and personally relevant for students. By emphasizing empathy and human-centered design, DT allowed students to connect deeply with philosophical concepts, transforming their learning experience from passive absorption to active participation. For example, S1 noted, *"Design thinking represents critical thinking by addressing societal challenges and enhancing user engagement and appeal."* This highlights how DT shifts the focus from abstract theories to real-world relevance, making philosophy more accessible and impactful.

The Empathize phase of DT played a crucial role in this transformation. Through detailed interviews, surveys, and observations, faculty gained a deep understanding of students' needs and challenges, leading to a course design that actively encouraged meaningful engagement. S3 reflected on this shift, stating, *"Being able to empathize and actually recognize those around you is a great feeling ... It's rewarding because it gives awareness and makes you understand, in a deeper sense, things that are mostly overlooked."* This empathetic approach enriched students' understanding of philosophical concepts and increased their motivation and satisfaction with the learning process.

Moreover, the practical application of DT made philosophical studies more relevant to students' lives. S5 emphasized that *"Philosophy exemplifies a subject that transcends traditional learning by integrating real-life challenges and solutions, making learning deeply relevant and impactful."* By applying philosophical theories to real-world problems, students saw the value of philosophy in addressing contemporary issues, further enhancing their engagement and commitment to learning.

ENHANCING CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKING

DT has significantly enhanced students' creative and critical thinking abilities by providing a structured framework for addressing complex philosophical challenges. The iterative nature of DT – empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and iterate – encouraged students to think multi-dimensionally and explore diverse perspectives. For instance, S4 described how DT *"elevates students' critical and creative thinking to a multi-dimensional experience,"* highlighting the shift from traditional text-based analysis to dynamic, design-oriented approaches.

The Ideate and Prototype phases were particularly transformative, as students collaborated to develop innovative solutions to philosophical problems. S6 noted, *"Design thinking provides valuable insights into effective learning by addressing broad societal, national, and global challenges."* This demonstrates how DT deepens students' understanding of philosophical theories and equips them with the tools to develop actionable solutions to real-world issues.

Furthermore, the learner-centered approach of DT fostered active engagement and intellectual curiosity. S2 shared, *"Design thinking immerses students in topics, fostering a challenging yet productive interaction that enhances engagement and understanding."* This active engagement is crucial for developing a robust analytical mindset and preparing students to tackle complex problems in their future careers.

PROMOTING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Implementing DT fostered a collaborative learning environment where students could share insights and collaborate on interdisciplinary projects. This was particularly evident in the Ideate phase, where collaborative brainstorming sessions and workshops played a crucial role. S7 highlighted the benefits of this approach, stating, *"Collaborative projects align students on similar intellectual paths, enhancing collective creativity and problem-solving."* This collaborative approach deepened students' understanding of philosophical concepts and built essential soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and cross-disciplinary thinking.

The Inclusive Design for Learning principles embedded in DT further enhanced collaboration by ensuring that all students could participate fully regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. S1 mentioned that *"Students doing philosophy often recognize it as the optimal model for comprehensive, integrated learning,"* underscoring how inclusivity fosters a more supportive and dynamic learning environment. Further, integrating digital tools and platforms, such as the *BigSky* LMS, facilitated collaboration beyond physical classroom boundaries, preparing students for the digital future. S2 reflected on this, *"Design thinking is poised to revolutionize digital learning, offering a format that transcends physical boundaries and fosters independent, innovative thinking."*

Addressing Implementation Challenges and Opportunities

While integrating DT into the philosophy curriculum has been game-changing, implementation has faced several challenges. The approach to addressing these challenges revealed the following key opportunities.

Online learning adaptation

Maintaining DT's interactive and collaborative aspects in virtual environments was a significant challenge. S5 noted, *"Design thinking is effective in creating engaging, student-centered educational experiences online,"* but this required robust technological support. These findings align with pandemic-era remote learning studies emphasizing the need for strong technological infrastructure (Affouneh et al., 2020). Successful implementation demands institutional support structures such as dedicated DT labs or innovation hubs.

Bridging theory and practice

Some students struggled to connect abstract philosophical concepts with real-world applications. This challenge echoes research on DT in humanities education, highlighting the theory-practice gap (Vial, 2015). Implementing structured scaffolding with concrete examples proved essential for helping students make these connections.

Time management concerns

DT's iterative nature required significant time commitment from students. This suggests the need for careful pacing and workload management, potentially integrating DT into smaller, more manageable modules to prevent overwhelming students.

Overcoming initial skepticism

Student resistance to new pedagogical approaches required clear communication about DT's goals and benefits. This aligns with studies on educational change resistance emphasizing the faculty's role in fostering an innovation culture (Panke, 2019). Faculty training and institutional support proved crucial for successful adoption.

The challenges encountered align with the broader literature on integrating DT in education (Brown, 2008; Kolko, 2018). Despite difficulties, DT integration offered significant educational innovation opportunities. The findings suggest that a phased implementation strategy, supported by faculty training and institutional partnerships, can help overcome these challenges while maximizing DT's benefits in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and inclusive learning environments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

DT is a powerful pedagogical tool for effective teaching, as demonstrated by the scientific insights from this study into how students learn best. Understanding students' perspectives on using DT, particularly in a philosophy course, can inform the conceptualization of curriculum design and the delivery of instruction, ultimately improving the student learning experience in the post-pandemic world. This research uses DT as a lens to reimagine digital learning environments, drawing on the DT problem-solving method to enhance student learning. Introducing DT into the curriculum can inspire instructional designers and technologists to create engaging, 21st-century learning experiences that future-proof institutions in an increasingly digital and interconnected world (Lynch et al., 2021).

BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITIES EDUCATION

The findings of this study have significant implications beyond philosophy education, particularly for other disciplines in the humanities that face similar challenges of abstractness, text-heavy approaches, and student engagement. The integration of DT into philosophy education offers a model that could be adapted to fields such as literature, history, and sociology, where applying theoretical concepts to real-world problems is often underemphasized.

Literature

In literature courses, DT could help students connect literary theories and texts to contemporary social issues. For example, students could use the Empathize phase to explore how characters' experiences reflect real-world challenges, such as social inequality or identity struggles. The Ideate and Prototype phases could then be used to develop creative projects, such as multimedia presentations or community workshops, that apply literary insights to address these issues.

History

In history education, DT could encourage students to move beyond memorizing dates and events to understanding the human experiences behind historical phenomena. The Empathize phase could involve exploring primary sources to understand the perspectives of historical figures. In contrast, the Ideate phase could involve designing solutions to historical problems, such as creating policy proposals or public history projects that address unresolved historical injustices.

Sociology

In sociology, DT could help students apply sociological theories to real-world social problems. For example, the Define phase could involve identifying a specific social issue, such as urban poverty or gender inequality, and the Prototype phase could involve developing actionable solutions, such as community programs or advocacy campaigns. This approach would make sociological concepts more tangible and relevant to students' lives.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

While the potential for DT in the humanities is significant, the challenges identified in this study – such as adapting to online learning, balancing theory with practice, and managing time constraints – are likely to be relevant across disciplines. The shift to online education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted the need for innovative pedagogical approaches that maintain engagement in virtual environments. The strategies developed in this study, such as using digital tools for collaboration and prototyping, could be valuable adaptations for other humanities disciplines facing similar challenges in remote learning contexts.

Beyond online adaptation, many humanities disciplines struggle to demonstrate their content's practical relevance to students and stakeholders. The DT framework offers a promising solution by providing a structured methodology to bridge this gap, encouraging students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges. This theory-practice integration represents a significant opportunity for humanities education to demonstrate its contemporary relevance while maintaining its intellectual depth and critical perspective.

However, the implementation of DT is not without its practical challenges. The iterative nature of Design Thinking requires significant time and effort, which could be particularly demanding in disciplines with heavy reading and writing requirements typical of humanities courses. Despite these time management concerns, the evidence suggests that the benefits of enhanced student engagement and practical application may ultimately outweigh these challenges. When thoughtfully integrated into curriculum design, DT can create more meaningful learning experiences that connect traditional humanities content with contemporary problem-solving approaches, potentially transforming how students perceive and engage with humanistic inquiry across various fields.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND FACULTY TRAINING

The successful integration of DT into humanities education will require institutional support and faculty training. Institutions should consider establishing DT labs or innovation hubs that provide resources and mentorship for faculty and students. Faculty training programs should also be developed to help educators adapt DT methodologies to their specific disciplines, ensuring that the approach is effective and contextually sensitive.

FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The findings of this research have far-reaching implications for higher education. First, it addresses the persistent challenge of demonstrating philosophy's relevance in an increasingly pragmatic academic landscape. Second, it equips students with a dual toolkit of critical thinking and creative problem-solving – skills essential for navigating contemporary global challenges. Finally, this approach suggests a new direction for philosophical education that preserves the discipline's intellectual depth while expanding its practical impact. These findings can help school administrators, educational design thinkers, key decision-makers, and educators understand DT's relevant roles in setting policies on technology integration and curriculum reforms in higher education.

This research also has implications for researchers in higher education looking for frontiers and trajectories to support future investigations on DT in the curriculum. By exploring how DT can be adapted to other humanities disciplines, such as literature, history, and sociology, educators can develop a more comprehensive understanding of its potential to transform higher education. This area is worth considering if we want digital learning to remain relevant and impactful in the post-pandemic world.

In this study, I have presented why DT is compelling and engaging, why faculty should integrate well-designed learning and teaching in the classroom, and what future digital learning research trajectories are available. By extending the application of DT beyond philosophy to other humanities disciplines, we can create a more dynamic, relevant, and future-ready educational experience for students across higher education.

CONCLUSION

This narrative case study demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating DT into philosophy education. By examining eight undergraduate students' experiences at a Manila-based institution, we show how DT creates a powerful bridge between abstract philosophical theories and practical solutions, making learning more relevant and impactful.

Our findings reveal that DT significantly enhances students' critical and creative thinking, enabling the meaningful application of philosophical concepts to complex societal issues. Three key themes emerged: empathy-driven engagement, which deepened students' connection to philosophical concepts; practical application, which made abstract theories tangible; and interdisciplinary collaboration, which enriched perspective-taking and solution development.

While this study focused on a single institution with a limited sample size, these methodological choices were intentional and aligned with qualitative research priorities. The purposive sampling ensured diverse perspectives and employed rigorous validation strategies, including triangulation with quantitative data, member checking, and peer debriefing. Thematic consistency across participants suggests data saturation, strengthening our conclusions despite the limited sample.

Combining case study and narrative inquiry, the hybrid research approach provided rich insights into how DT transforms philosophy education. The study highlights critical implementation factors: faculty training requirements, technological infrastructure needs, and the value of phased adaptation (Balakrishnan, 2022; Panke, 2019).

By integrating philosophical rigor with DT's practical tools, this research positions philosophy education as a catalyst for developing future-oriented problem-solvers. It emphasizes the importance of contextual sensitivity and iterative refinement in pedagogical innovation. Future research could explore multi-institutional comparisons or longitudinal assessments of student outcomes. Ultimately, this work demonstrates how humanities education can actively address societal challenges while preparing students for an interconnected, rapidly evolving world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance the integration and effectiveness of DT in educational settings. A phased approach to mainstreaming DT in pedagogical strategies is recommended to ensure sustainable implementation.

First, institutions should develop comprehensive faculty training programs to equip educators with the necessary skills for effective DT facilitation. Given the central role of empathy in DT, as emphasized by participants, structured empathy training sessions should be incorporated into the curriculum to deepen students' ability to apply human-centered approaches in problem-solving. This could lead to more meaningful and impactful innovations.

Second, fostering partnerships with industries and local communities can bridge the gap between theory and practice. Collaborations with external stakeholders can provide students with real-world design challenges and mentorship opportunities, enriching their learning experience while enabling tangible contributions to societal issues. Such partnerships reinforce the practical relevance of academic training.

Third, investment in technology infrastructure is critical to support DT processes, particularly in facilitating remote collaboration and prototyping. Institutions should consider establishing dedicated DT labs or innovation hubs equipped with tools, resources, and mentorship opportunities. These spaces can nurture creativity and collaborative problem-solving, which is essential for DT-driven learning.

Fourth, a continuous assessment framework should be implemented to evaluate the long-term impact of DT on student outcomes. Regular feedback mechanisms – such as student surveys, curriculum reviews, and alignment with industry trends – can help refine teaching methods and ensure the DT approach remains dynamic and relevant.

Finally, supporting faculty and student research on DT across disciplines can strengthen its theoretical and practical foundations. Incentivizing the publication of findings will contribute to broader academic discourse, offering evidence-based insights that benefit educational institutions worldwide.

By adopting these strategies, educators and policymakers can maximize DT's potential to transform learning, fostering innovation, empathy, and real-world problem-solving skills in students. This research suggests that integrating DT into philosophy courses represents a significant opportunity for pedagogical innovation while maintaining the rigor and depth traditional to philosophical inquiry.

The implications extend beyond immediate classroom practice, suggesting a broader impact on how we approach philosophical education in higher education settings.

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